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SHOUTS & MURMURS

COLLEGE ESSAY

by Christopher Buckley

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... your entrance essay must not only demonstrate your grasp of grammar and ability to write lucid, structured prose, but also paint a vivid picture of your personality and character, one that compels a busy admissions officer to accept you.

—Online college-application editing service.

It was a seventeenth-century English-person John Donne who wrote, “No man is an island.” An excellent statement, but it is also true that “No woman is also an island.”

The truth of this was brought home dramatically on September 11, 2001. Despite the fact that I was only twelve at the time, the images of that day will not soon ever be forgotten. Not by me, certainly. Though technically not a New Yorker (since I inhabit northwestern Wisconsin), I felt, as Donne would put it, “Part of the main,” as I watched those buildings come down. Coincidentally, this was also the day my young sibling came down with a skin ailment that the doctors have not yet been able to determine what it is. It’s not like his skin condition was a direct result of the terrorist attack, but it probably didn’t help.

I have a personal connection to the events of that day, for some years ago my uncle by marriage’s brother worked in one of the towers. He wasn’t working there on 9/11, but the fact that he had been in the building only years before brought the tragedy home to Muskelunge Township.

It is for this reason that I have resolved to devote my life to bringing about harmony among the nations of the world, especially in those nations who appear to dislike us enough to fly planes into our skyscrapers. With better understanding comes, I believe, the desire not to fly planes into each other’s skyscrapers.

Also, I would like to work toward finding a cure for mysterious skin ailments. Candidly, I do not know at this point if I would be a pre-med, which indeed would be a good way to begin



finding the cure. But I also feel that I could contribute vitally to society even if I were a liberal-arts major, for instance majoring in writing for television.

Many people in the world community, indeed probably most, watch television. Therefore I feel that by writing for TV I could reach them through that powerful medium, and bring to them a higher awareness of such problems as Global Warming, Avian Flu, earthquakes in places like Pakistan, and the tsunami. Also the situation in the White House with respect to Mr. Scooter Liddy. To be precise, I believe that television could play a key role in warning people living on shorelines that they are about to be hit by one humongous wave. While it is true that in northwest Wisconsin we don't have this particular problem, it is also true that I think about it on behalf of people who do. No man is an island. To be sure.

Another element in my desire to devote my life to service to humanity was my parents' divorce. Because I believe that this is valuable preparation for college and, beyond, life. At college, for instance, one is liable to find yourself living in a situation in which people don't get along, especially in bathrooms. Bathrooms are in that sense a microcosm of the macrocosm. Bathrooms also can be a truly dramatic crucible, as the playwright Arthur Miller has demonstrated in his dramaturgical magnum opus by that title.

I am not one to say, "Omigod, like poor me," despite the fact that my dad would on numerable occasions drink an entire bottle of raspberry cordial and try to run Mamma over with the combine harvester. That is "Stinkin' Thinkin'." As the Danish composer Frederick Nietzche declared, "That which does not kill me makes me longer." This was certainly true of Mamma, especially after being run over.

Finally, what do I bring to the college experience? As President Kennedy observed in his second inaugural, "Ask not what your country can do to you. Ask, what can you do to your country."

I would bring two things, primarily. First, a positive attitude, despite all this crap I have had to deal with. Secondly, full tuition payment.

While Dad pretty much wiped out the money in the process of running over Mamma—she was in the house at the time—my grandparents say they can pay for my education, and even throw in a little "walking-around money" for the hardworking folks in the admissions department. Grandma says she will give up her heart and arthritis medications, and Grandpa says he will go back to work at the uranium mine in Utah despite the facts that he is eighty-two and legally blind.

In this way, the college won't have to give me scholarship money that could go to some even more disadvantaged applicant, assuming there is one. ?

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